

## Why I believe most team building programs fail



Some of you might know about one of my major interests in contributing to a better education system in Romania and that together with some wonderful people, we are in the early stages of planning the introduction of compassion and kindness training in schools, as early as possible, via the efforts we do with [AVE](#), its collaborators and many more.

December is usually a good month to put thoughts and things in order, to analyze the year that has passed and reflect on the next one and on its challenges. While running on a weekend, I had some revelations on what would a compassion & kindness training actually imply.

So, this is one of them. It is related to team buildings and why I believe team buildings done as they are done in most cases, are a waste of time and money.

There are also certain facts that sustain my “theory” although I imagine some might find it arrogant.

I would start from the observation that as far as I could see and learn from other companies, **most team building programs create a short-term euphoria that disappears very quickly after the event is over.** Very similar to most diets.

**Most teams are very diverse, with people of different personalities, experiences, backgrounds, education and values.** And while it is pretty easy to interact well with people with similar standards, mindset, values, personalities, objectives, passions, etc. it is not as easy to interact with people who are very different from us.

Working with someone very different than you often leads to being judgmental. And how do you avoid that without tolerance and compassion, patience, reflection on the attitude, kindness etc. even in moments when the other person behaves badly, aggressively, displays different values, etc.

Judging others is not about you being right or wrong, it is simply about allowing yourself to be “poisoned” with negative emotions which you can only “remove/diminish” in my opinion with mental training, be it mediation or whatever method functions with each of us.

When someone harms us (and it often happens in teams willingly or not) we have the inevitable tendency to

become angry and resentful. And these emotions act against the “team building” objectives unless the people who harmed us are really close friends and, in this case, it is often a temporary “anger”.

### **What happens in our brains when we are aggressive?**

Simply said, it is about amygdala hijacking, a phenomenon triggered by fear mainly. And unless there is a brain damage, no one could desire anger.

Difficult to imagine that someone could be compassionate, empathetic, patient and tolerant in general without a trained mind.

### **So, what does a team building actually imply?**

It implies a non-judgmental attitude/ tolerance to a very different person than you.

In addition, in a society that has been focused on enhancing individual performance during school time (without too much focus on mental fitness, except Asian cultures), how fair is it to be expected of you to be a real team player when starting work? Not so fair.

Why? Because after many years of training our habits\* in a certain direction (competitiveness, survival, individualism, etc.) we have to adapt to the other team members. People with very different lives and pretty different views and styles and values and competences and so forth...

- Why do most team building retreats only result in a temporary team cohesion and performance?
- Why aren't too many sustained changes in team cohesion after such a retreat?
- How much can you expect from a 2-3-day program without serious individual and teamwork after?

**My conclusion:** Long lasting habits start from training our own mind in a sustainable manner and while we could become compassionate, flexible and tolerant with others' differences, this is the moment we could actually have a team building that works. Not before that.

*\*Research shows that the formation of new habits happens after approx. 21 days (neuroplasticity) of daily training*

*New habits are formed after ~ 2 months/8 weeks and life time habits start after sustained training of 18 months of INDIVIDUAL training/mental fitness.*

*“when we ourselves get angry for example is it because we want to? No. it comes to us involuntarily. Like falling ill. Becoming angry is not something we do deliberately. Furthermore, given that the perpetrators of the harm are just like me and you, human beings who aspire to happiness and wish to avoid suffering, they too are deserving of our compassion and concern. Kindness and forgiveness are therefore much more appropriate to hostility than anger.” The Dalai Lama, Beyond Religion.*